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## 400 Parolees Attend Summit For Fresh Start On Life

Once a criminal leaves a jail cell and is back in the community, it's sometimes not the last time they are in trouble with the law. Struggles adjusting to society can cause more crimes, which has the Illinois Department of Corrections stepping up to make a change.

Locking up those who break the law isn't the only job of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Their goal is to never see the same offender again.

"Once they are out on parole, they are responsible for following the law and the terms of their parole. We have a responsibility to help them succeed. And that's what we are doing here," said Director of Communication for IDOC, Tom Shaer.

But to be put back on track, parolees need extra help. 400 of them from Sangamon County took part in a Summit of Hope event on Tuesday. It's a service provided by the state that provides everything from free medical attention to haircuts, all under one roof.

"Everybody needs these services, but an ex-offender needs them to a greater extent, and it's often a little more challenging for them. Transportation is an issue," said Shaer.

"If all this stuff wasn't here, I would have to spend at least a week non-stop on the internet looking up all these groups that you don't know about because they aren't just standing right in front of you," Bartholomew Griffith said.

Bartholomew Griffith was recently released from jail, but already has a new job.

While it may seem like he is already a success story, attending the summit has opened new opportunities.

"I'd like to go back to school, but I didn't think I would be able to afford it or not and they said they could work with me and help me out, so that's great because I really do need to go back to school," said Griffith.

While preventing parolees from repeating past mistakes benefits a community, state lawmakers say it goes even a step further.

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"Recidivism is the highest cost driver in the Department of Corrections budget that obviously has a sizable impact on the state budget," said Senator Andy Manar. "So anything we can do to reduce that is a positive thing."

The Illinois Department of Corrections tries to hold a summit every month at a location throughout the state. Since May of last year, 16,000 parolees have used the program.

Because of the high turnout, IDOC reports the rate of repeat offenders dropped 8 percent over the past two years.